Chapter X

The Question of Gender in (Re)orienting to the Civil-Military Relationship within Humanitarian Space

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ABSTRACT

Shifting globalization and securitization processes and concerns about the militarization of humanitarian space have introduced new theoretical-critical questions regarding the civilian-military relationship. Given significant value differences, the goal of effective civil-military "collaboration" has proven to be a challenge. Contributing to this is the question of gender, as militaries consist mostly of men, while humanitarian civilian organizations tend to include comparatively more women. As few psychologists have examined gender in this context, this analysis sought to address this gap theoretically and critically. Two main gender-related themes emerged from qualitative interviews with military and civilian workers involved in recent international engagements: (1) challenges faced by civilian women in terms of not being viewed by military men as an equal collaborative partner or credible leader, and (2) perceptions that women and men do humanitarian work differently. The themes are considered in light of liberal and cultural feminist theories and work on transformational dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

Within shifting societal, political and economic contexts, and in the midst of globalization and securitization processes that include the militarization of humanitarian space, new theoretical and critical questions have emerged regarding the interface between humanitarian civilian and military worlds. Further, recent theoretical work has focused on the dialogical aspect of human interactions and relationships (Gergen, 2009; Stam, 2006), but what this dialogical aspect means in concrete societal institutions needs to be explicated. In this contribution I provide an example of the complexity of such dialogues, or of reflections on dialogue, by focusing on interactions between two broad institutions – one military and the other civilian – while attending to the gendered nature of the civilian-military relationship from the perspective of feminist theorizing. A qualitative study will demonstrate these intricacies of "dialogue" as well as their implications from a gendered perspective.

In earlier work, Ball and Febbraro (2011) discussed some of the organizational cultural and philosophical differences between military and civilian organizations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For instance, the mandate of militaries is primarily securitization, often through the use of force, whereas for many NGOs it is the alleviation of human suffering. Further, military organizations tend to be hierarchical in structure and decision-making, and tend to have short-term visions and mandates regarding humanitarian aid and reconstruction projects. NGOs, in contrast, tend to have a more flattened organizational structure, to

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emphasize consensus in decision-making, and to define success in terms of long-term social and economic development that is driven by the local community. Notwithstanding such differences in philosophies, values, mandates, cultures, and structures, the realities of complex humanitarian emergencies and international military engagements have meant that military organizations and civilian organizations, such NGOs involved in humanitarian aid, reconstruction, or development work, must frequently develop strategies for effective civil-military interaction. Such strategies may range from relatively straightforward modes of coexistence (or rather: coordinated avoidance) to various forms of collaboration. However, not surprisingly given significant philosophical, value, and other differences between military and civilian organizations, the civilian-military relationship is fraught with complexity, and thus the goal of effective civil-military "collaboration," where attempted, has often proven elusive (Olson & Gregorian, 2007; Patrick & Brown, 2007; Winslow, 2002).

Contributing further to the challenge is the question of gender. As Ball and Febbraro (2011) have noted, there can be large differences in the "demographic composition" of military organizations, on the one hand, and non-governmental and other humanitarian civilian organizations, on the other. Militaries tend to consist mostly of men, whereas NGO and United Nations agency field staff tend to include comparatively more women (Miller, 1999; Williams, 1998; Winslow, 2002). Further, as sociologist Laura Miller has argued, these "demographic differences may help to perpetuate a distance [in the cultural sense] between the two populations" (Miller, 1999, p. 192). However, although the civil-military relationship has received much theoretical attention from sociologists and political scientists, relatively few social scientists, including psychologists, have examined this relationship theoretically and critically as it pertains to the question of gender.

The theoretical and critical analyses proposed here are intended to address this gap by examining, through qualitative analysis, the role of gender in civil-military interactions in recent international engagements, as understood by civilian and military actors themselves. I theorize that even within militaries that have made considerable strides in their representation of women, such as the Canadian military, which allows women to serve in all roles including combat, subtle barriers may still exist for military women. Moreover, these barriers may also affect perceptions of women who work in NGOs and other humanitarian civilian organizations (see also Winslow & Dunn, 2002). I argue accordingly that if male military members do not fully accept the presence or leadership of women within their own military ranks, then they may not fully embrace the idea of working alongside predominantly female (and often female-led) NGOs. Thus, gender may add yet another layer of complexity to the civilian-military relationship.

As I will describe in more detail, several gender-related themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of civilian-military dialogue (or more precisely, participant reflections on such dialogue). Primarily, these themes revolved around challenges faced by civilian women in terms of not being viewed by military men as an equal collaborative partner or credible leader, and regarding perceptions that

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women and men do humanitarian work differently. In particular, I argue that such themes may be considered in light of various strands of feminist theory. For instance, negative attitudes held by military men towards women leaders of humanitarian organizations may be understood within liberal feminist theory as reflecting a general societal backlash against women who resist gender socialization by taking on non-traditional (and powerful) roles as leaders. In contrast, the notion that women and men "do humanitarian work differently" may resonate with cultural feminist theories that assume, and celebrate, women's unique approaches and nurturing qualities, in this case, within the humanitarian context.

Further, current civilian-military relationships may also be considered in light of more recent theorizing on appreciative inquiry in human organization. In addition to focusing on constructive modes of practice, and on the positive, the exceptional, and the possible, proponents of appreciative inquiry propose that change in human systems is "triggered by dialogic-relational modalities of learning and discovery," for instance, in moments when "inquiry into collective strengths allows people to unite" (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004, p. xiv). Why change should occur in such moments of connection is an important question, as Cooperrider and Avital point out, particularly in light of the many critical and feminist theories that argue that change is best catalyzed through dissatisfaction with the status quo and analysis of the problematic. Rather, a viable pluralism (e.g., between civilian and military worlds) may depend on the power of appreciation, because appreciation creates a language of interaction that embraces difference and helps create new cultures where diverse values are heard and honoured. What is needed may be a new kind of transformational dialogue that creates organizations in relational settings that are "polyphonic" with different voices (p. xviii). Mary Gergen and her colleagues, for instance, focus on the function of dialogue in the organizing process and on the development of a vocabulary of discursive action with practical consequences for effective organizing (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004). Understanding dialogue as the process of relational coordination, Gergen et al. contrast generative and degenerative dialogue to explore how certain forms of coordination may lead to organizational growth or demise. In particular, they advocate for transformational dialogue, that is, dialogic practices designed to break through barriers to communication. They caution, however, that all voices are not equally valued in many organizations – and this point may be particularly relevant in the gendered civilian-military context. They see dialogue, however, as allowing various groups of people a voice to challenge traditional authorities and taken-for-granted realities. In their view, the presence of difference may provide a "powerful scaffolding on which to build new visions of the future" (p. 13).

Before proceeding further, however, I would like to position myself with respect to the subject matter at hand. I work at a Canadian defence organization as a civilian defence scientist, although my professional identity, reflecting my training in psychology, is also that of a social and organizational psychologist, with expertise in the psychology of women and gender, including feminist and other critical theory. My project, in working for a defence organization, is to work for positive social

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change *from within*, one might say, a traditional bureaucratic government organization, and more specifically, to support the goal, espoused for instance by Canada's military, of gender diversity and inclusiveness. It is also my contention that effecting such change within the military context, broadly speaking, may have similar positive consequences for the civilian-military interface, including gendered aspects of this relationship.

METHOD

As this chapter is informed by qualitative analysis, I proceed with a description of method. First, in terms of participants, 65 people were interviewed across three separate studies (for study 1, N=11, see Holton et al., 2010; for study 2, N=10, see Thomson et al., 2010; for study 3, N=44, see Thomson et al., 2011a, b). In total, 19 participants were military and 46 were civilian. Twenty-six participants (12 male, 14 female) worked for NGOs or international organizations (IOs) involved in humanitarian aid or development; 19 (17 male, 2 female) were members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) holding ranks from sergeant to brigadier-general; 17 (13 male, 4 female) were public servants from Canadian government departments or agencies involved in development, diplomacy, or governance work; 1 (male) was a development subject-matter expert (SME); and 2 (both male) were media personnel. Civilian participants worked for various NGO or IO organizations such as Medécins sans Frontières (MSF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UNHABITAT), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Peace Dividend Trust. Government civilian participants worked for departments or agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) or Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). Media personnel worked for Canadian Press. Many CAF participants were Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) officers or operators whose function was to work directly with civilian organizations and populations on international missions.

In total, 45 men (17 military, 28 civilian) and 20 women (2 military, 18 civilian) participated in interviews. Among the women, 90% were civilian, whereas almost 90% of the military participants were male. However, just over 60% of the civilians in this study were male. Ages ranged from 24 to 70. Most participants were Canadian; many had a graduate/professional degree or some graduate training, whereas others had completed college, university or high school. All had recent international operational experience (e.g., in locations such as Afghanistan, Haiti, the former Yugoslavia, Indonesia, and Cyprus), and all had interacted with multiple (civilian and military) actors on operations at some point in their career.

In terms of procedure, the interviews were conducted by trained researchers, male and female, all civilian, none by me, either in person, by telephone, or by video teleconference (VTC, via Skype), mostly in Canada, in 2008, 2010, or 2011. Teleconferences or VTCs were held with participants in locations such as Afghanistan, Liberia, Uganda, Kenya, Washington, and several Canadian cities

(Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary). Prior to conducting the interviews, ethics approval was obtained for the research from the Defence R&D Canada Human Research Ethics Committee. A semi-structured approach was used for the interviews in order to promote spontaneous discussion of the participant's experience in interacting with diverse actors in an operational setting, including any gender-related experiences. Before the start of the interview, participants were briefed on the objectives and potential benefits of the research and on the nature of their participation (i.e., interview format, time commitment, confidentiality), as well as any possible risks. Participants were informed that they could review the interview transcripts if they chose to for verification purposes and to indicate any errors or simply to edit out portions that they deemed not suitable for any reports or publications. Interviews averaged approximately 1½ to 2 hours in length, and were tape-recorded and transcribed with consent. Conventional qualitative data-analytical tools and techniques were used to analyze the interview data through a content analysis using NVivo8, a qualitative software package.

RESULTS

Prevalence of Gender-Related Themes

Several gender-related themes emerged regarding the role of gender in civil-military relationships, as expressed by participant comments. Such themes were expressed overall by approximately one-third of participants (23/65, or 35%), including 11 men and 12 women. Thus, a relatively greater proportion of women (12/20 or 60%) than men (11/45 or 24%) expressed gender-related themes. In addition, overall, a similar proportion of military (7/19 or 37%) and civilian (16/46 or 35%) participants expressed gender-related themes. However, among both civilian and military participants, women were more likely to express such themes than were men (56% vs. 21% among civilian participants, 100% vs. 29% among military participants).

Challenges Faced by Civilian Women in Working with Military Men

One major theme, voiced by 9 participants (6 women and 3 men), concerned the challenges faced by civilian women (e.g., members of NGOs, IOs, or government agencies), particularly *younger* civilian women, in terms of working with military men, especially with respect to being perceived as an equal collaborative partner. For instance, one female NGO worker felt that getting one's views heard by military men is difficult:

> "…The biggest challenge I've had is to…and I've been actually told this by military people, which is interesting, I'd come in quite young, new graduate and I'm a woman and I have no military background, and so getting your thoughts heard and actually acknowledged and action[ed] is [a] very difficult process. … I've

had to master how to…get my thoughts in from the back door."
(Female NGO worker)

This perspective was echoed by a male NGO worker, who spoke of the negative perceptions around credibility that some senior military men may possess regarding younger NGO women:

> "So it's some of the more senior levels don't understand who they are going to be interacting with except that they might be younger and they might be female. But it doesn't mean they have less experience or are less knowledgeable in their field, you know?" (Male NGO worker)

Another female NGO worker felt that military forces work more effectively or comfortably with men, both within the military and in relation to the civilian world:

> "I would go as far as to say [all] forces I've worked with, work more effectively with men. They are more *able* to work with men, and that's not because the *men* they're working with are more effective, let me be clear about that. It's that *they're* more able to work with men." (Female NGO worker)

Similarly, a female government agency worker felt that the military are not accustomed to working with women, particularly younger women, in authoritative positions. This situation was complicated by different working styles that were reportedly more characteristic of the women civilians than of the military. Specifically, the women were described as joking, talking, and negotiating, but working hard nevertheless, a style of working that seemed uncomfortable for the military:

> "So if a military person coming in that hadn't worked in a civ-mil headquarters before…I think a lot of them found it really weird at first because you've got all these, first of all, young women which they're not used to working with, and young women in authoritative positions, another shocker. And we joke around and we do all this stuff and they see that as 'not working very hard' and it took a while before they could actually see that we're working just as hard and busting our chops, but we do it in a very different way. We don't have to be like all yelling at each other or ordering each other around, we'll negotiate, chat, talk. And once we got over that, then we would all have a good time. But you could tell…some of them [military] were not comfortable with this kind of working environment."(Female Government Agency worker)

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As I will describe in more detail, the idea that women and men have a different working style foreshadows the other theme that I'll highlight in this chapter, regarding the *celebration* of women's approaches to humanitarian work. Still, other participants (for instance, government agency workers, both female and male) spoke of the "macho" attitudes of military men vis-à-vis civilian women working in development or government roles:

> "…It was just like this sort of cruel, macho, you know, what can a development officer bring to the table, and this is ridiculous, this is no place for you [meaning for a female]." (Female Government Agency worker)

As mentioned earlier, the gender-related themes that emerged in this civilian-military relational context may be considered in light of various strands of feminist theory. Specifically, the negative attitudes held by some military men towards women leaders of humanitarian organizations that I have highlighted here may be understood within liberal feminist theory as reflecting a general societal backlash against women who resist gender socialization and gender norms by taking on non-traditional (and powerful) roles as leaders (see, e.g., Febbraro, 2004, on negative reactions to women leaders in the Canadian combat arms). Indeed, liberal feminism, which draws its inspiration in part from the traditional political liberalism of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, emphasizes the belief that women are entitled to full legal and social equality with men, and favours changes in laws, customs, and values to achieve the goal of equality. As Mary Crawford and Rhoda Unger have noted (Crawford & Unger, 2000), liberal feminist theory has been especially useful in encouraging research on such topics as how people react to others when they violate gender norms; gender socialization; and sex discrimination in employment. Importantly, liberal feminism emphasizes similarities between women and men, and maintains that, given equal environments and opportunities, the genders will behave similarly. However, the political liberalism underlying liberal feminism has been criticized for its rather narrow emphasis on individual rights and equality, rather than reflecting a broader social-structural politics, or intersectionalities among, for instance, gender, race, and class.

Within a liberal feminist tradition, Alice Eagly and her colleagues have offered *role congruity theory* as an explanation for the gender stereotyping of leadership positions and its effects (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). According to this theory, perceived gender roles may conflict with expectations regarding leadership roles, especially when an occupation is held predominantly by one gender. For example, women may be evaluated negatively when they violate gender-role expectations by failing to exhibit affective or "feminine" leadership behaviours in a male-dominated context (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). My own previous work on women leaders in the Canadian combat arms suggests that, even as strides in gender integration have been made within this male bastion in the Canadian context, negative reactions to women leaders (who by definition violate traditional gender

norms) may still sometimes occur (Febbraro, 2004). Such gender-related dynamics may also apply to women leaders of NGOs.

Considering gender integration through the lens of appreciative inquiry, "adding new voices to the conversation" (i.e., women's voices to the male world of the military), may contribute to productive difference, or to a shift in perspective (Gergen et al., 2004, p. 14); but also possible in the gendered civilian-military context, given the above, is the "silencing of the less powerful" (p. 18). Indeed, even proponents of appreciative inquiry recognize that "the hegemonic thrust of discursive communities tends to marginalize or alienate those who fall outside" (p. 19). To bridge this gap between alienated realities, Gergen et al. propose dialogic practices that differ substantially from those sustaining a given reality, in order to cross boundaries and create constructive dialogues between parties, including parties with a history of conflict. In particular, they suggest transformative dialogue, a relational accomplishment that creates new spaces of meaning and new worlds. However, as will be discussed, transformative dialogue in the gendered civilian-military context would also need to consider the power relations that configure this context. Indeed, given such "relational configurations" (p. 24), changes in dialogic practices may not be sufficient to bring about new realities and new worlds.

Women and Men Do Humanitarian Work Differently

In addition to the major theme in the present analysis regarding the challenges faced by civilian women, a number of other, less frequently expressed gender-related themes emerged from the interviews. In particular, a second theme that emerged was the notion that women and men "do humanitarian work differently." In contrast to the liberal feminist approach, which emphasizes gender similarity or equality, this particular theme, I suggest, resonates with cultural feminist theories that assume, and celebrate, women's unique approaches and nurturing qualities. Based in Nancy Chodorow's work on the reproduction of mothering (Chodorow, 1978), cultural feminism emphasizes differences between women and men; further, this broad theoretical perspective stresses that the qualities traditionally associated with women have been devalued and should be honoured and respected in society. Cultural feminism has been useful for understanding the importance of unpaid work contributed to society by women, such as child care. It is often used in discussing gender differences in values and social behaviours, such as the apparent tendency for women to be more nurturing, caring, and oriented towards others' needs. Applying this theory to the present context would highlight the caring nature of women's humanitarian work. In the words of one male IO worker:

> "When women get together a different picture of humanitarian needs emerge, because with the men, they tell you what they want, not necessarily what they need. … But when the women talked to our women the priorities shift slightly because humanitarian intervention, when it's delivered through the hands of men,

invariably turns into a demonstration of power. But that same assistance delivered through the hands of women is a humanitarian act because it has an immediate impact on her immediate family, her extended family and the wider community." (Male IO Worker)

In this context, women's humanitarian work is constructed as "invariably" and perhaps thus inevitably a humanitarian act, one that has immediate positive impact on families and communities, and one based on expressed needs. The essentialism and potential de-politicization of this construction of women and gender is apparent, and it certainly may be criticized as such. However, this understanding of women's humanitarian labour, and of gender, nevertheless represents a valuing of "women's ways" consistent with cultural feminism, as well as the rejection of humanitarian intervention as a demonstration of power – even as this understanding of women risks de-politicization, essentialism and, like liberal feminism, a lack of intersectionality. Further, the focus on celebrating positive qualities traditionally associated with women, such as nurturance and care, also resonates with the positive impetus of appreciative inquiry.

Also worth exploring, however, is the question of which theories of gender – cultural, liberal, or other critical/feminist – hold the greatest potential for bridging gaps between civilian and military worlds. Given that transformative dialogue is fundamentally about facilitating the collaborative construction of new realities and the re-coordination of conflicting domains, what sorts of understandings of gender offer up the strongest foundations for communication, collaboration and common purpose in the gendered civilian-military context? Will various configurations of gender (as well as age, social class, etc.) reveal differing forms of effective dialogue, as Gergen and colleagues suggest? Or, as they likewise caution, might relations of power – in this case, gendered relations of power – preclude the kind of dialogue that is required for organizational or even broader change?

Notwithstanding, each one of the feminist theories discussed here, although limited in various respects, helps to illuminate some of the complex challenges that continue to characterize the civilian-military relationship as well as the gendered nature of this relationship. Indeed, the present qualitative analysis, informed by liberal and cultural feminist theorizing, helps to explicate the intricate nature of this relationship within concrete civilian and military institutions. Nevertheless, I invite other feminist and critical theorists to contribute additional insights into this relationship – as well as its dialogical aspects – as the area of humanitarian space is clearly one in need of further gender and discursive analysis.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with liberal feminism, a major theme of the present analysis concerned the challenges faced by civilian women (e.g., members of NGOs, IOs, or government agencies), particularly younger civilian women, in terms of their working relationship with military men, especially with respect to being perceived as an equal

collaborative partner. Some civilian women reported difficulty in getting their voices heard and in being perceived as credible by their military counterparts, and felt that military men were generally more comfortable working with other men than with women. However, consistent with cultural feminism, others spoke of, and seemed to celebrate, women's approach to humanitarian work vis-à-vis men's. Such feminist theories reflect divergent views of gender, in terms of gender difference and similarity, as well as gender politics. On the one hand, liberal feminist theory, based in liberal political theory, brings attention to the importance of gender equality, and highlights the societal backlash experienced by women who resist gender socialization and norms by taking on non-traditional (and powerful) roles as leaders. However, liberal feminism emphasizes the individual rather than a broader social or structural politics. Cultural feminism, on the other hand, celebrates "women's ways," but at that same time, risks essentialism and de-politicization. Furthermore, both strands of feminism, as articulated here, do not address intersectionality. Also explored was the potential of appreciative inquiry (i.e., transformative dialogue) for bridging gaps between civilian and military worlds. Given gendered power relations, such dialogue may be insufficient for bridging gaps between such "discursive communities," even as they may reveal differing forms of effective dialogue or celebrate traditional feminine values. Nevertheless, the theoretical analyses offered here suggest that the social and political construction of gender may represent a continuing challenge when considering the civil-military interface in the current shifting global environment. In this way, such critical reflections may contribute to theorizing on the gendered nexus of the civil-military relationship and to an explication of the dialogical aspects of this relationship within concrete societal institutions. Such reflections may also serve to advance the broad project of supporting from within societal institutions, efforts towards gender diversity and inclusiveness.

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